

B'ha'alotkha

בהעלתך

“When you set up”

Numbers 8:1 – 12:16

Torah Together



In this portion, we find the Israelites celebrating the first Passover, one year after they left Egypt. A short time later, they leave Mt. Sinai and begin their journey to the land God had promised to their forefathers. At this time, they had no idea how long the journey would take them.

1. Setting up the Lamps - 8:1-4

a) How were the seven lamps on the lampstand to be positioned? On what would their light shine? Do you find any symbolic significance in this?

The lamps were to be positioned so that they illuminated the area in front of the lampstand, i.e., the table of showbread. Yeshua is the “light of the world” and the “bread of life.”

b) Who gave this instruction? Why do you suppose God cared how the lamps were positioned?

God gave the instruction to Moses to give to Aaron. Our God is a God of perfection - and so we could see the symbolism in this passage.

2. The Setting Apart of the Levites - 8:5-26

a) Why was it necessary to purify the Levites? How was this done? By whom was it done? How was this different than what was done for Aaron and his sons?

The Levites were purified (or made ceremonially clean) by sprinkling water over them, having them shave and wash their clothes. (By contrast, the priests were “made holy” and given new garments.) Both made sacrifices as part of the process, but the ordination of the priests was a more elaborate process.

b) Why were the Levites set apart (or sanctified) for God? What did this have to do with final plague God sent upon the Egyptians?

In verses 16-19, God explains that when He struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians, at that time every firstborn male of all the Israelites was set apart for Him. He then allowed the Levites to substitute for the firstborn males of the other tribes of Israel. Thus the Levites were substituted for all of the firstborn males of Israel. This is an example of “redemption,” which is central to God’s plan of salvation.

Patterns and Plans

Leviticus 8:4 reads, “The lampstand was made exactly like the pattern YHWH had shown Moses.” Can you remember when and where God showed Moses the pattern for the lampstand and other parts of the Tabernacle?

Scripture Link:

Leviticus 8 describes the ordination of Aaron and his sons as **priests**. The process was similar to the one described here for the rest of the Levites. While the entire tribe of Levi was set apart (or sanctified) for use by God, those of Aaron’s family were assigned tasks involving more responsibility.

Levite Working Careers

The work that a Levite had to do was physically strenuous, breaking down, moving, and setting up the Tabernacle whenever God instructed the Israelites to move. It was more efficient and safer to assign the heavy work to those best able to handle it. In addition to this, the work always had to be done precisely and with care, requiring a period of training and apprenticeship.

The First Passover

This Passover marks the first anniversary of the Israelite's departure from Egypt. Note how God made provision for everyone to celebrate this event. This included those who, for whatever reason, might be unable to celebrate it at the proper time as well as those foreigners who wished to celebrate it. It is probable that Passover has been continuously celebrated somewhere in the world in every year since this first one.

c) According to verse 19, what work was to be done by the Levites? At what age did the Levites begin this work? How was retirement handled?

The Levites were to work under the leadership of Aaron and his sons (the priests) to "do the work at the Tent of Meeting on behalf of the Israelites." They started their work at age 25 and worked until age 50. After that, they could still help, but they had no regular assigned duties.

3. The Passover - 9:1-14

a) When and where was the first Passover celebrated by the Israelites? Review the events that had occurred in the lives of the Israelites during the past year.

The Israelites celebrated the first anniversary of the Passover on the 14th of the first month (Nisan or Abib) at Mount Sinai. It had been only 1 year since they had left Egypt miraculously, found their way to Mount Sinai, met with God and received His commandments and built the Tabernacle.

b) What special provision did God establish for those unable to celebrate Passover? For what reasons might one not be able to participate in the *Pesach Seder*?

If, because of ceremonial uncleanness or because of travel, one could not participate in the Passover celebration, then they could celebrate it one month later.

c) What were the consequences for one who was able but chose not to celebrate the Passover? Why do you think God commanded this? Under what conditions was an alien living among the Israelites allowed to participate in the Passover celebration?

If one who was able chose not to celebrate Passover, then he was "cut off from his people," a common phrase which seems to indicate excommunication or ostracism. Clearly, celebrating Passover was important to God. An alien could celebrate it as long as he did so in accordance with the rules.

4. The Cloud above the Tabernacle - 9:15-23

a) Describe the cloud that covered the Tent of the Testimony or the Tabernacle. Was it visible at night? (This cloud is often referred to as the "*Shekinah*" glory of God.)

From the day it was first set up, the cloud (glory of God) rested on the Tabernacle. It shone like fire at night and looked like a cloud in the daytime.

b) How did the Israelites get their “marching orders” from God? When they set out, did they know where they were going or how long they would be traveling? How did they know where to stop and make camp?
Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tabernacle, the Israelites packed up and followed the cloud. Whenever it came to rest, they stopped. They never knew how long they would be traveling or where exactly they were going.

c) Can you find any lessons for your own life in how God led the Israelites?

This is a model for how God would like to lead us as we “march” through our life. To be of the most use to God, we need to be ready to move when and where he tells us to. In so doing, we not only are an obedient servant of God, but He blesses us for our obedience.

5. The Silver Trumpets - 10:1-10

a) How many silver trumpets did God instruct Moses to make? What was their purpose? Describe the various ways in which they were to be used.

God told Moses to make 2 silver trumpets. They were to be used to call the community together. Different trumpet blasts were used to call the entire community together, or just the leaders, while others announced what groups were to set out marching.

b) Who was to blow these trumpets? In verse 9, what does God say He will do when he hears the trumpet blast? Do you think this is literally true?

The sons of Aaron (the priests) were to blow the trumpets. God says He will “remember Israel” when He hears the trumpet. It’s not that He forgot them, it’s just that He will bless them and rescue them from their enemies.

c) Do you think these trumpets serve the same purpose as the shofar?

It’s not clear whether these silver trumpets were used for different purposes than the shofar or not.

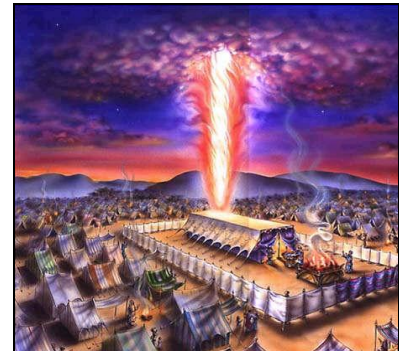
6. The Israelites Leave Sinai - 10:11-36

a) When did the Israelites set out from Mount Sinai? Where did they stop? How long do you think it took them to get there?

On the 20th day of the 2nd month of the 2nd year (after the “late comers” Passover celebration), the Israelites left Mount Sinai. Verse 33 says they traveled for 3 days until they reached the Desert of Paran.

b) If you were standing beside the road when the nation of Israel passed by, describe what you would see.

See accompanying chart.

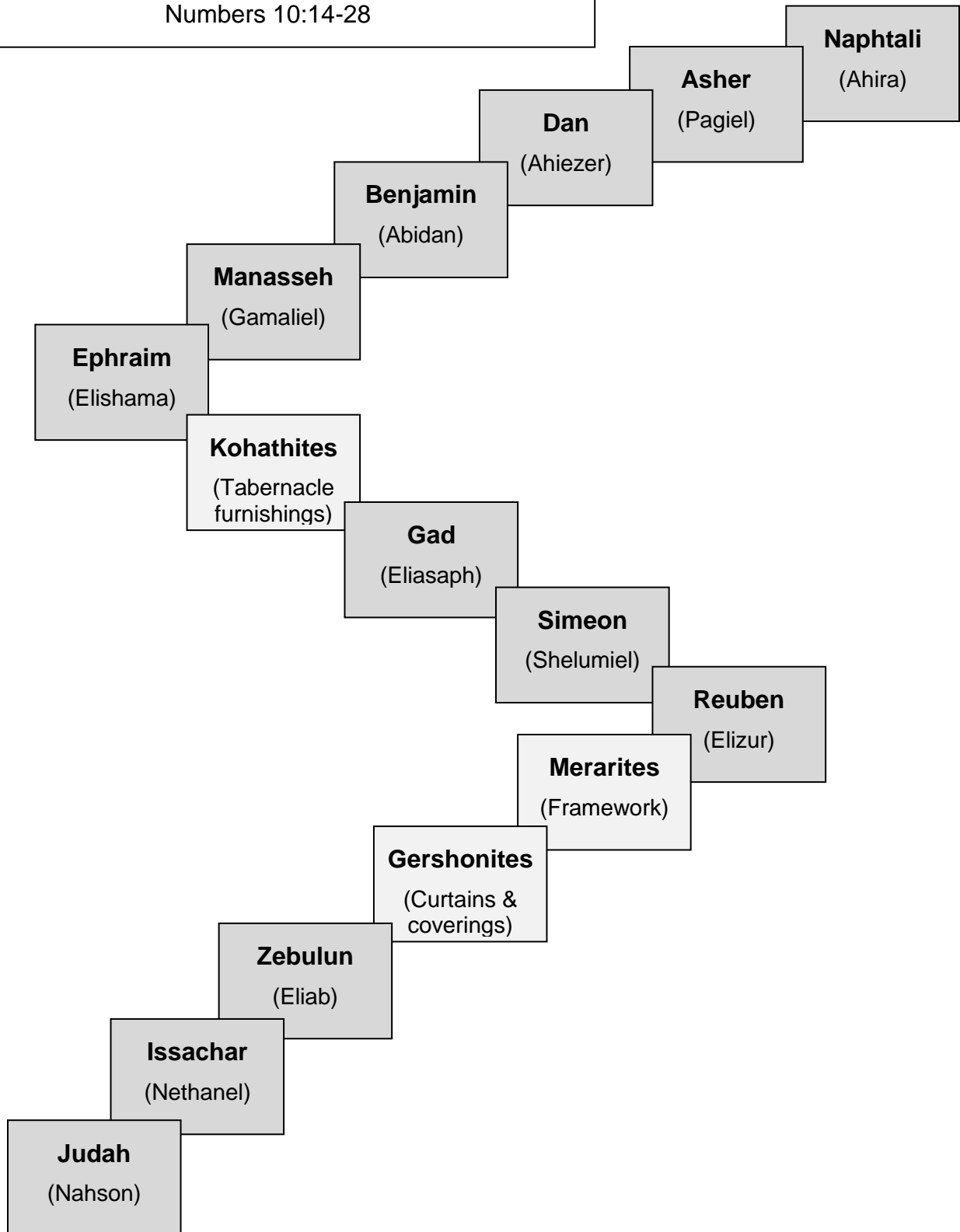


Scripture Links:

Numbers 9:15 describes the first time the glory of God descended on the Tabernacle. This same event is also described in **Leviticus 9:23-24** and **Exodus 40:34-38**. This cloud that looked like a pillar of fire at night was God Himself dwelling with His people. And He personally directed them, when and where they would move, each day.

Israelites on the March

Numbers 10:14-28



c) Verses 29-32 describe an exchange between Moses & Hobab. Who was Hobab? Was he an Israelite? Why did Moses want him to accompany them? Do you think he did? (Hint: see Judges 1:16)

These verses describe a conversation between Moses and Hobab, Moses brother-in-law, who was a Midianite. Moses wanted him to accompany them because 1) he would share in the good things God was going to give them, and 2) because Hobab knew the desert and could help them on their way. The passage referred to in Judges implies that Hobab went with them.

d) What did Moses say whenever the Ark of the Covenant set out? What did he say whenever the Ark came to rest? What effect do you think this might have had on the Israelites who heard him?

Whenever, they would set out, Moses asked that God's enemies be scattered and whenever they stopped, Moses asked that God return to the people. This was probably very encouraging to the people, reinforcing God's leadership.

7. Fire from the Lord - 11:1-3

a) What caused God's anger to be aroused in this passage? In what way was His anger manifested? What happened? What name did they give this place?

The Israelites complained about their "hardships." God became angry and sent fire (perhaps bolts of lightning) around their camp, consuming some of the outskirts of the camp. Moses prayed on their behalf and the fire died down. They named the place Taberah, meaning "burning."

b) What kinds of complaints do you suppose reached God's ears?

The complaints were probably typical of the Israelites, showing lack of trust in God.

8. Quail from the Lord - 11:4-35

a) In this passage, who first started complaining? What was the nature of their complaint? Is this the first time we have encountered this type of complaining?

The first complainers were "the rabble with them," i.e., the Egyptians who had followed them out of Egypt. They missed the meat they ate in Egypt. It seems that the Israelites often complained about the food God gave them.

b) When Moses went to God with the people's complaint, what did he say? Does this seem typical of Moses? Why do you think he was so demoralized? Do you think God acted mercifully toward Moses?

Moses complained that the burden of caring for the people was too great for him. He asked that God just let him die rather than try to satisfy the people. This seems uncharacteristically negative for Moses, perhaps because of the strain of leadership. God did not respond in anger to Moses' complaining.

A God of Order

Sometimes the detail in the *Torah* is surprising. To specify the order in which the tribes were to travel illustrates the thoroughness of God's teaching and instruction. Notice that when the Israelites arrived at a new location, those carrying the Tabernacle structure (the Gershonites and the Merarites) arrived before those carrying the holy objects that were to go inside the Tabernacle. In this way, the Tabernacle structure could already be set up so that the Kohathites could immediately place the objects inside.

Arousing God's Anger

At this point, the Israelites had been out of Egypt for barely a year. They had witnessed their miraculous escape from Pharaoh through the Red Sea, they had heard God at Mount Sinai, and they had seen God come to dwell with them when they completed the Tabernacle. One wonders how they could complain to Him about anything. Before we fault the Israelites too much, however, we might do well to recall when and how we have complained to God for our hardships.

Complaining to God

Carefully analyze Moses' complaint to God in **Numbers 11:10-15**. How was Moses' complaint different than the complaints of the rest of the Israelites? It would appear that Moses was truly frustrated with the lack of thankfulness and lack of faith of the people. He seemed to feel that it was his responsibility to provide for and take care of the people. God was able to look into Moses' heart and see that Moses was truly committed to doing the work that God had given him but that the burden seemed too heavy to him. Recognizing that his attitude was right, God moved to provide the help Moses needed to accomplish his work. It's important to carefully examine one's heart before complaining to God.

c) What did God first do to address the issue? Why was this an appropriate first response for Moses' problem?

God first commanded that 70 elders be endowed with His spirit so that they could help Moses with his leadership responsibilities. This seems to show that God understood that Moses was overwhelmed and burned out.

d) What was God's second step in addressing the issue (verses 18-20)? Was he pleased with the Israelites? What was Moses' response to God's words? Again, does this seem typical of Moses? How did God respond to Moses?

Next, God instructed Moses to tell the people to consecrate themselves for the next day he would meet with them and they would eat meat. God was displeased with the Israelites lack of faith and desire to return to Egypt. Moses, with uncharacteristic lack of faith, questioned how he could provide meat for so many people. God replied, "Is YHWH's arm to short?"

e) What happened when the seventy elders were assembled at the Tent of Meeting? What was special about Eldad & Medad? Analyze the exchange between Joshua and Moses about this situation. Can you learn any lessons from this?

When the elders had assembled at the Tent, God put his spirit on them and they began to prophesy. Eldad and Medad were 2 elders who had not gone to the Tent but began to prophesy in the camp. Joshua appeared to be jealous for Moses and asked him to stop them. Moses said he wished all were prophets.

f) How did the Israelites get the meat they craved? Did they get enough? What else did God do? Why was the name given to the place appropriate?

The next day, a wind blew in quail 3 ft. deep around the camp. The people ate till they became sick. God also struck them with a plague (perhaps from spoiled quail meat?) and many died. Kibroth Hattaavah means "graves of craving."

9. Miriam and Aaron Oppose Moses - 12:1-16

a) About what specifically did Miriam & Aaron complain concerning Moses? Given their words in verse 2, what do you think their real complaint was? What sin was in their heart that motivated this complaining behavior? (*lashon ha-ra*)

Miriam & Aaron complained about Moses' Cushite wife. (Some think Zipporah was a Cushite, other opinions were that Moses had remarried.) Verse 2 seems to imply that they were jealous of Moses' leadership position. (Lashon ha-ra literally means "evil speech" and refers to slander and malicious gossip.)

b) Do you think Moses wrote the parenthetical phrase in verse 3?

The comment concerning Moses' humility was likely added by a later editor, perhaps Joshua who added words to the Torah (Joshua 24:26).

c) How quickly did God respond when He "heard" Miriam and Aaron? What did He do?

God "at once" commanded that Moses, Aaron, and Miriam come to the Tent of Meeting. God didn't allow the spirit of lashon ha-ra to grow or spread.

d) Analyze God's words to Miriam and Aaron in verses 6-8. What was God's view of Moses? What question did He ask Miriam & Aaron?

God pointed out to Aaron & Miriam that Moses was different (above) all other prophets "in all my house" in that God spoke directly and clearly to Moses and not in riddles & dreams. God asked why then Aaron & Miriam weren't afraid to speak against Moses.

e) When the cloud of God's presence lifted from above the tent, what was the condition of Miriam and Aaron? Why do you think one was affected and not the other?

Miriam was covered with leprosy (often a punishment for lashon ha-ra). Aaron appeared unaffected, perhaps because the sin had originated in Miriam's heart. (Also, Aaron couldn't act as High Priest with leprosy.)

f) To whom did Aaron respond and what did he say? What does this indicate about his role in this affair? What do you think his attitude was at this time?

Aaron addressed Moses and asked forgiveness for their sin, indicating he was also guilty. I'm sure he was contrite and fearful. (Like the golden calf?)

g) What did Moses do? How did God respond? Do you think this experience had a lasting effect on Miriam?

Moses prayed that God would heal Miriam. God commanded that she remain outside the camp for 7 days and then she could return, indicating that she would be healed at that time. (Consistent with laws of Tzara (leprosy).) Both Aaron & Miriam were clearly profoundly effected by this experience.

h) Can you find any lessons for your own life in this story?

God clearly takes a dim view of lashon ha-ra.

The Evil Tongue

The Hebrew term *lashon ha-ra* means "the evil tongue" or "tongue of the evil one." It's clear that God takes a dim view of spreading gossip and sowing seeds of discontent. Notice how long God waited before addressing the problem of Miriam and Aaron's rebellious talk. Also, God's words of correction to Miriam and Aaron were very direct as was His punishment. **James 3:3-6** makes clear the power of the tongue to do evil.

Digging deeper

1. How long had it been after the Israelites had left Mount Sinai that they began to complain? While we often feel that the Israelites suffered from a severe lack of faith, can you be sure that you would not have fallen to the same temptation? How often do we complain about the good things God has given us?

The Israelites had been “on the road” for no more than 3 days when they started to complain. Before we condemn the Israelites lack of faith & thankfulness, it is a good idea to examine our own lives to make sure we haven’t also complained about the blessings God has given us.

2. What lessons can you learn from Miriam and Aaron’s experience with *lashon ha-ra*? Two elements were at work in this story: one was the jealousy and evil in their hearts and the other was the words that came forth from this heart attitude. Which do you think is worse? How can you guard against *lashon ha-ra*?

The root of the sin of Aaron & Miriam was the jealousy that they harbored in their hearts. This manifested itself in their slanderous words (perhaps only between themselves). Often we can resist the temptation of gossip, but the real need is to purify our heart. This is done through prayer. Lashon ha-ra is not a problem if you harbor no evil toward another in your heart. Yeshua taught that sin begins in the heart.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Zechariah 2:14 - 4:7

Brit Hadashah : John 19:31-37; Hebrews 3:1-6